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### **KENNEDY AND MILLER RELEASE GAO REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE READING FIRST PROGRAM**

Today, Rep. George Miller (D-CA) and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) addressed the flawed implementation of the Reading First program and the urgent need to end the Department of Education's track record of bias and abuse in administering the program.

"The GAO report highlights, once again, the mismanagement of the multi-billion-dollar Reading First program," said Miller, the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. "The Education Department has vowed to prevent future mistakes by taking remedial actions, but the only way we can be sure of the Department's commitment is by conducting vigilant oversight of Reading First."

"Today's GAO report once again shows us that the Administration is more interested in handing out political favors than in trying to find the best way to teach children to read," said Kennedy. "The GAO report confirms that the Department failed to take appropriate steps to give States clear guidance and impartial assistance in implementing Reading First. Our students and teachers deserve better."

According to GAO, officials from ten states reported that Department officials advised eliminating specific programs or assessments. Officials from four states also reported recommendations to adopt specific programs or assessments from Department officials. The No Child Left Behind Act explicitly prohibits the endorsement, approval, or sanction of any curriculum by the U.S Department of Education. GAO found that the Department has no policies or internal controls to ensure their employees are complying with these provisions.

"Placing this multi-billion-dollar program in the hands of a small group of people with ties to specific reading programs and publishers was totally irresponsible," said Miller. "We must continue to investigate how Reading First was implemented to learn from past mistakes and prevent future abuses. The program should be run in the best interests of children, not the interests of a handful of publishers that happen to be connected to the right people."

As part of his investigation into the conflicts of interest issue in Reading First, today, Senator Kennedy is issuing formal document requests to the RMC Research Corporation, the contractor hired to administer, monitor and help states implement the Reading First program. Today's GAO report found that RMC officials were improperly involved in the review of state reading programs. This latest request is in addition to the eight document requests Senator Kennedy sent out earlier this month to various Reading First contractors and consultants.

“More information is needed to determine why specific programs or assessments were eliminated under the Reading First program,” said Kennedy. “The program was created to support and enhance the teaching and learning of reading so all students can become proficient readers. That should continue to be the goal. I’m committed to making any changes needed to safeguard the program from abuse.”

The Reading First program was created in 2002 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act to improve reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade. The Department provides formula grants to states with approved applications and then states award sub-grants competitively within the state. The Department and its contractors support states and districts with technical assistance in implementing the programs.

Chairmen Kennedy and Miller requested the study on Reading First, along with Senators Enzi, Bingaman and Lugar. Miller and Kennedy plan a follow-up request to GAO to further study the decisions made by states and schools in selecting curriculum under the Reading First program, and to gain additional insights on how the Department's interpretation of scientifically-based research comports with the statutory provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act.